

# WHITEHEAD. (W. R.)

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AT THE  
FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONVENTION  
OF THE  
COLORADO STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY.

(JUNE, 1884.)

W. R. WHITEHEAD, M.D., (University of Paris.)

OF DENVER,

Professor of Anatomy in the Medical Department of the State University of Colorado.

RETIRING PRESIDENT.

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*Gentlemen of the Colorado State Medical Society:*—I should be false to the best feelings of my nature, if I did not endeavor to show how much I appreciate, and tell you how cordially I thank you for this unsought distinction, for this spontaneous mark of your esteem in choosing me to preside over your deliberations. I have no parliamentary ability; but in its place I offer to you my kindly wish to promote harmony and preserve good-fellowship. I feel that you have not realized the requirements that this position imposes upon me at this particular juncture of affairs, which so intimately concerns us all as members of an honorable and respected profession. For some years past we have been more or less disturbed regarding certain questions of polity that perplex and embarrass the ablest minds of the profession. In my humble opinion, the eminent and talented President of the late National Medical Association has failed fully and satisfactorily to meet these questions. I wish that I could meet and answer them in a manner consistent with my own views, and that would also be acceptable to all; such however is impossible. If there is one thing that is dear to me after my family, and after the welfare of my country, next in order comes the love which I cherish for the honor, and good name of my profession. The medical profession of America, in times past as at the present day, shows within its ranks men of the most emi-





nent talent, and scholarly attainments of which any country can boast ; and what is grander, and nobler, men of moral worth, and of individual force of character that make men, and that make nations truly great.

The manhood of the medical profession and the manhood of this country depends upon such men. While the political caldron is bubbling and boiling under the anxious eyes of the nation, and elements as vile as those thrown into the caldron by the witches of Macbeth form some of the ingredients of the political pot; an unquiet nation looks on, and in the various walks of life, side by side with other good and worthy men stands the physician as the faithful citizen, the watchful sentinel of the public health, and as the sturdy defender of truth, of justice and morality ; and his great moral worth is felt and appreciated, 'though he be the humblest of country doctors, and

“His humble house is such that harbors quiet rest,  
The cottage that affords no pride nor care.”

But there is a great and serious evil that afflicts the country and that sorely afflicts the physician, and he believes himself powerless to attack and remove, or even to mitigate this evil : It is the arrogant and blatant quackery that stalks boldly in his sight, and that occasionally lurks and hides itself under the broad Ægis of the profession. In the hope to abate this evil, the cry has gone forth from the profession, and now commences to be uttered by the public press : Elevate the standard of medical education ! This cry has reverberated throughout the length and breadth of our land and has found a sympathetic echo in the heart of every hard worked and worthy physician, who feels himself robbed by a pestilent horde of empirics, and it meets with a warm response from every well-meaning and intelligent citizen. Nobly have some of our medical schools attempted to raise their standard. Some of them, more hampered than others, have tried—and faltered—and fallen back, because they lost students ; there is, however, a perceptible and gratifying progress ; but it is only that which is urged on by the advancing thought of this enlightened age, which demands a better preparation for the struggle for existence in every department of life, among a people whose intellect is daily feeling the influence of a more developed and higher civilization, and which forces even the charlatan to resort to more intellectual methods of decep-

tion than formerly. Deception and fraud will always continue to exist in every business, and in every occupation; and quackery has existed from the earliest period, and will continue "to the last syllable of recorded time." Legislative enactments and laws tend to repress crime and to lessen quackery, but no country of the world is free from a criminal class or from charlatans. That which will be found most to abate each will be the enlightenment of a nation; especially if this have a republican or democratic form of government. Much has been said about the excellence and efficiency of the system of medical education in European countries, a great deal of which I grant is true; but the advocates of a German or a French university course seem to forget the peculiar nature of our own free institutions; the peculiar habits of thought and self-relying character of our people. Besides, Americans are surrounded by many and multiplied conveniences and comforts of a modern civilization, generally and equally diffused throughout their country not found elsewhere, so that the conditions of the American people and of American physicians are quite different from those found in European countries.

In Europe the different grades of the population, especially in the past periods of a more aristocratic state of society, invested certain classes, or certain individuals, with superior intellectual acquirements and refinements, far above the mass of the people, sunk in ignorance and easily inflamed with prejudice against the assumption of those of their class who should attempt to instruct or advise them. The influence of this condition of society is still felt at the present time, notwithstanding a marked amelioration and freer state of thought, and of independence of the European people. But this cause contributes to exact of the student a longer and a more thorough preparation for the study of medicine, or of other pursuits. The same result may be obtained, in my opinion, in this country; but it must be accomplished in a different way, and in conformity with the character of our social habits and of our self-relying methods of thought and of action. \* We should never forget

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\* I wish that the American Medical Association, which is so national in character; and the State Medical Societies which are such representative bodies, really represented something more than merely voluntary organizations having no official connection whatever with either the national government, or with state governments. But I believe, that the time is approaching, when an intelligent and deserved recognition by the people through legislative enactments will reward the earnest labors of National and State medical organizations.



in the consideration of this subject, i. e. the elevation of the standard of medical education, that our country is a free republic ; not such as former republics, in name only, but that we are in fact and in practice a republic, shaping and directing by our example and influence the thought and destinies of the world. To quote an eminent French author DeToqueville, whose work on "Democracy in America" should be familiar to all of our countrymen and especially to our public men, will confirm my remarks concerning the self-relying character of Americans, who says De Toqueville, without ever having taken the trouble to define the rules of a philosophic method of thought, are in possession of one common to the whole people. Maxims class opinions, says he, exist less in the United States than elsewhere; facts only are looked for, results weigh more than methods, each man seeks the reason of things for himself, aims at the substance or meaning of things, rather than the form. This constitutes, then, the philosophic method of thought of Americans, and is becoming that of the world, as the tendency to equality and free government grows.

The above remarks of this distinguished Frenchman fifty years ago, are still more applicable to our people at the present day. "In a republic like ours," says De Toqueville, "the less prone is each man to place implicit faith in a certain man, or a class of men ; but his readiness to believe the multitude increases, and opinion is more than ever mistress of the world."

In questions concerning our relations to society, or to the public, it appears to me desirable that we should keep in view these relations, which it is not within our power, as individuals nor as organized bodies of medical men, to influence effectually, except so far as we ourselves deserve the approbation of all good and just men. If there are faults existing within our ranks, and we seek not to correct them, they become in my opinion, more glaring when they are shielded by a medical organization, which, in the eyes of the public, then assumes only the shape of a protective association, differing in no manner from one of a commercial character.

Happily the hearts of the mass of our physicians beat in unison with the noblest aspirations, and are animated with the purest sentiments of devotion to all that is good and true. It is, I believe, a fact that is admitted by all, that gen-

erally the standard of medical education is not what it should be, and the question arises, what is the cause of this and how is it to be improved? The cause is known to every intelligent physician, and is fast beginning to be perceived by the public: It is the standard of many medical schools, which are exclusively dependent on their tuition fees for support, and are compelled to lower their requirements to obtain students, and compete with other schools of a similar character.

If a reform should come, and come it will, it must be based on legislative enactments urged on by the people. Such a reform has already been mooted, and must when it comes, be such as to take away absolutely from the medical schools the power to grant diplomas that shall entitle the graduates to practice. A State Medical Council, properly qualified, having no connection whatever with any medical school, recognizing only the qualifications of candidates, and adequately paid by the state should, in my opinion, be the examining body to determine the qualifications of those who apply for authority to practice medicine, or its branches. I would have the examinations of candidates for authority to practice medicine as public as any of the examinations in our public schools—indeed more public, and accessible to the most critical observation. I am quite well aware of the hostility with which this would be received by some of the medical schools, yet it should not be. It is my confident opinion that public sentiment will eventually direct legislatures of this, and of other states to the adoption and enforcement of some similar method. But, sirs, do we believe that deliberations of an acrimonious nature, which the agitation of this subject is likely to evoke from less considerate and less fair-minded gentlemen than ourselves, would favorably influence public opinion in elevating the character and dignity of our profession, and thereby add weight to our views as a body of medical men, or as individuals on this or any other subject? The opinions of each other, or of the public, should be met and answered in a manner to denote the calm and conscious possession of intellectual strength, and of moral conviction.

These remarks lead me to the consideration of the means by which, I believe, the elevation of the standard of medical education is to be accomplished. In my humble judgment, the first step towards this object is one that will at-



tain two desirable and principal ends at the same time ; one will supply our medical schools with young men better prepared to enter upon the study of medicine, and also diminish illiteracy, the facile prey of deception and of superstition ; the other end to be obtained is the enlightenment of the public concerning many facts of medicine and its collateral sciences. How is this to be done ? I answer, by giving your aid as citizens, as men of a broad, tolerant, and learned profession, to extend, multiply and develop the means of private and public instruction in Colorado.

The public instruction, from the primary schools to its highest departments of learning and of science, stands to-day as a bright beacon to direct the populations of less favored states to our much favored commonwealth. The well appointed and efficient public schools of Colorado are the purveyors of a higher education, which is developing with the rapid progress of our high school instruction. The mist of ignorance and of superstition, twin companions of a bigoted intolerance, is disappearing before the bright rays of our public school education. The pet, the idol of the people of this state, is its grand, and efficient system of public schools.

The elevation of the medical profession must march side by side with the progress, and development of thought of the best minds of our people.

The effort of Colorado is to give to its people, the highest forms of public instruction, so that public opinion may rightly shape the intellectual and moral tone of the press, of the rostrum, and of the pulpit ; free from a narrow, sectarian bias. I think that you will agree with me that an education, accessible to all, that inculcates truth and morality, that is large, expansive and liberal, is the best mold of public opinion, and is what the progress of this age demands,

The physician is a scientist, and as such is broad and liberal in his views. His observations of the mysterious phenomena of life and death, and of the vital processes that evolve new forms out of shapeless protoplasm ; his acquaintance with the natural laws that govern matter, all contribute to give to him grand conceptions of the vital forces that pervade nature, and they impart to him a sublime and reverent awe for the Supreme Power of the universe, and which leads him in his path through life to seek



knowledge and truth, to be faithful and virtuous, and to cultivate those endearing friendships that form the noblest attributes of man.

As the number of well-instructed youth increases, and adds to the intellectual resources of our state, so will the excellencies of the physician be more appreciated, and the demand for well educated physicians be greater.

Those who anticipate a rapid or sudden elevation of the standard of medical education, by the action of our medical associations in conference on this subject, or even by legislative enactments, before the public demands it, must, in my opinion, meet with disappointment. But I have an abiding faith in the good results of the growing diffusion of a correct knowledge concerning this subject, and a more intelligent concert of action, in future, between the representative men of our profession and the public.

Gentlemen, we have a field of usefulness before us, that if rightly cultivated may be productive beyond our fondest anticipations. The germ theory of disease that has so widely attracted the attention of medical men, and of the world, whether false or true,\* is a subject of study that irresistibly claims our consideration not only in the quiet and leisure hours devoted to research, but in the dread silence and meditation of the sick room, when a dear life, a human life, that has clustering around it sweet memories, and fond associations, flickers like an unsteady and feeble flame, and—

“Intent we wait through all the solemn scene,  
Glad if a hope should rise, from nature's strife  
To aid our skill, and save the lingering life.”

Public and private hygiene demand our attention to-day as they never attracted the notice of the world before, and there is no part of medical knowledge that so deeply interests the intelligent public, and that so distinguishes our efforts as the preservation of the public health.

The endemic diseases of Colorado that show peculiar phases of their development, and course may advantageous-

\* The germ theory of disease though plausible, has not been proved. The mere presence, and possible coincidence, of an extremely low and specialized form of life in the tissues—or dejections of the cholera patient, or in the lungs of a consumptive, are not proof of a special germ as the cause of either cholera, or consumption. Indeed, in my opinion, it is questionable, if many of us, in the profession, are not still very much under the influence of traditional teachings of a past age, that do not readily consort with the views of modern science, or with the now generally accepted doctrine among scientific men, of evolution. I would regret to believe that medicine has not generally kept abreast with the collateral sciences which lend their aid to the study of the phenomena of life. Those interested in this subject may consult with profit the chapter on the “Beginnings of life” in the “Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy” by John Fisk, M. A. L. L. B., Vol. 1, page 423, preceding and following this page. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Publishers, Boston.

ly engage the thoughts of some of us.

The meteorological conditions of Colorado afford opportunities for further and enlarged observation.

The influence of our climate on surgical operations and the greater or less relative mortality after such, is an important subject for investigation, and would furnish material for an interesting and valuable paper.

Some one among you might collate the facts and enrich with his own experience and observations the data which relate to the prevalence of drunkenness, of the opium habit, of epilepsy, neuralgia, and of insanity, and show their influence on the products of inter-marriages in causing the deterioration of the human race. He might even go further and point out the possible dangers to the permanence of our civilization, through the influence of such causes operating through successive generations, on the mental, moral and physical condition of the race.

Indeed, sirs, we have a broad field in which to win honor and esteem from the public, and thus elevate the medical profession.

In conclusion, gentlemen, I sincerely congratulate you upon the auspicious future and distinguished honors that await this, our State Medical Society, an organization which we may with emulous pride compare with any similar association in this country.

You have grown to a society of large proportions, representing the manhood and intelligence of our commonwealth in a manner not surpassed by any convocation of citizens of our happy and enlightened state. A state whose quota, as I am informed, of the fifteen millions of dollars of appropriation for the benefit of the illiteracy of our country, would not much more than pay for the foundation of one of Denver's finest public schools, while there are other states which receive millions.

Gentlemen, we have reason to be proud of Colorado for her comparative freedom from illiteracy, and we are also proud of the Colorado Medical Society.

I have taken the liberty in my official capacity, as your chairman, to invite, through our secretary, every unrepresented society of our state, in good standing, and governed by the code of our National Association, to send delegates to our Society. The Boulder County Medical Association, which is unrepresented in our State Society, numbers near-



ly twenty members, who are gentlemen, in good standing, and who are representative men of the profession of this state. This action of mine is respectfully submitted for your approval.

Now, sirs, allow me to say to each and every one of you that I cordially wish you all the happiness that can possibly fall to the lot of so worthy a body of men, and that kindly feelings and good fellowship be promoted, that honor grace your lives, and that love and prosperity, with troops of friends, accompany your declining years.







